



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly Planning & Development Committee Testimony of Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell March 20, 2019

Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Champagne, Representative Zawistowski, and members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on **Governor's Bill H.B. 7192, An Act Concerning Municipal And Regional Opportunities And Efficiencies.**

This testimony will specifically focus on the Governor's proposed Commission on Shared School Services, which is addressed in sections 7-10 of the bill before you. As you may have seen in a press release issued by his office this morning, Governor Lamont has heard the concerns of Connecticut residents with regard to this proposal and would like to amend the original language outlined in H.B. 7192 to ease those concerns and better reflect his initial intent.

The Governor is not seeking any type of forced regionalization, and the changes he is proposing in this new language make that plain and clear. Having said that, the reality of the world we live in is also plain and clear, we are no longer living in a time where it is practical, or feasible, for the state to have over 200 independently operated school districts. This is our reality, and it is the education of our children that is at stake. As it stands today, some of our smaller school districts are unable to offer a full complement of educational programming, while they simultaneously spend money on administrative and operational services that could be shared with a neighboring town that is also struggling. The collaboration conversation must happen in earnest and the Commission on Shared School Services will provide a vehicle to make that conversation happen.

The Commission, comprised of a regionally diverse set of educational stakeholders at both the state and local level, will be charged with studying this issue and producing advisory recommendations on best practices. We are extremely fortunate in Connecticut to have 17 regional school districts already in operation that we can look to for those best practices. They will not only be able to tell us what works, but also, what does not work. We need not reinvent the wheel, but we also cannot continue to operate in silos. Each dollar that is wasted on duplicative administrative and operational services that are not being performed efficiently or effectively, is a dollar that is being taken directly out of the classroom.

As Governor Lamont so rightly said in his budget address, education is the opportunity engine for all of our young people. I could not agree with him more. Education is the great equalizer. There is likely nothing more crucial to setting a child up for success in college, career and life than that child's elementary education. We need to keep that in mind as we move this conversation forward. It is vitally important that we remain child-centered when engaging in discussions that pertain to how education is funded and structured in our state. Our adult decisions directly impact the lives of our children. For all of these reasons, the Department stands in strong support of the Governor's proposal and is happy to work with the General Assembly to provide whatever guidance or information you will need to make informed decisions to ensure equity and excellence in education for all students.